

PART I
Chapter 1

Why Invest in Open and Inclusive Policy Making?

Governments everywhere are under pressure to do more with less. Open and inclusive policy making offers one way to improve policy performance and meet citizens' rising expectations. Public engagement in the design and delivery of public policy and services can help governments better understand people's needs, leverage a wider pool of information and resources, improve compliance, contain costs and reduce the risk of conflict and delays downstream. This chapter describes government goals for, and the benefits of, open and inclusive policy making in OECD member countries.

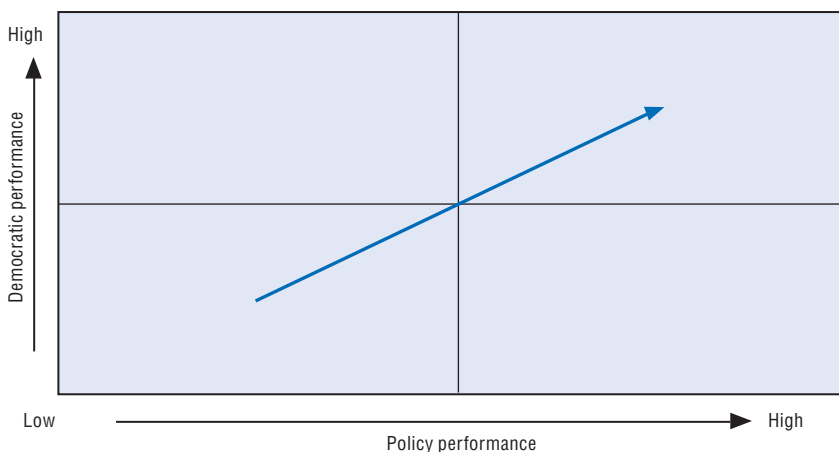
“Public engagement is not just desirable; it is a condition of effective governance.”
 – Donald G. Lenihan (Advisor on Public Engagement to the Government
 of New Brunswick, Canada)¹

The limits of government action are increasingly visible to the naked eye. Complex policy challenges ranging from the international to the personal level – in such diverse areas as climate change, ageing populations and obesity – cannot be “solved” by government action alone. Tackling them effectively will require the concerted efforts of all actors in society and of individual citizens. Governments everywhere are under pressure to do more with less. All are working hard to deliver effective policies and services at least cost to the public purse; many are trying to leverage resources outside the public sector. Last but not least, governments are seeking to ensure and maintain high levels of public trust. Without high levels of public trust, government actions will be at best, ineffective and at worst, counterproductive.

At the same time, more educated, well-informed and less deferential citizens are judging their governments in terms of both their “democratic performance” and their “policy performance” (Klingemann and Fuchs, 1995). Open and inclusive policy making is most often promoted as a means of improving democratic performance. For good reason too, as it enhances transparency and accountability, public participation and builds civic capacity.

Yet open and inclusive policy making can do much more. It offers a way for governments to improve their policy performance by working with citizens, civil society organisations (CSOs), businesses and other stakeholders to deliver concrete improvements in policy outcomes and the quality of public services.

Figure 1.1. Policy performance and democratic performance



Can open and inclusive policy making deliver better policy performance?

Governments can benefit from wider public input when deliberating, deciding and doing. Investing in greater openness and inclusion in policy making and service delivery can help achieve:

- **Greater trust in government.** Citizens generally judge democratic governments on the basis of two main measures: their “policy performance” (i.e. their ability to deliver tangible positive outcomes for society) and their “democratic performance” (i.e. the degree to which government decision-making processes live up to democratic principles). For policy performance, the focus is mainly on outputs. For democratic performance, the focus is mainly on processes. Successfully delivering on the first front generates credibility, success on the second generates legitimacy. Open and inclusive policy making can contribute to reinforcing both.
- **Better outcomes at less cost.** Making policy in a more open and inclusive way can contribute to raising the quality of policy outcomes and ensure the better use of public funds, by designing policy measures on the basis of better knowledge of citizens’ evolving needs. Meanwhile, the nature of public services is changing. Today, a growing proportion is intangible, knowledge-based services which require a higher degree of interaction and involvement of end-users as active collaborators, rather than passive beneficiaries. **Co-design and delivery** of policies, programmes and services with citizens, businesses and civil society offers the potential to tap a broader reservoir of ideas and resources.
- **Higher compliance.** Making people part of the process of prioritising and deliberation, helps them to understand the stakes of reform and can help ensure that the decisions reached are perceived as legitimate, even if they do not agree with them. More open policy making contributes to raising compliance levels with decisions reached.
- **Ensuring equity of access to public policy making and services.** Despite progress in economic development, many social, economic, cultural and political cleavages which permeate modern OECD societies are growing: between poor and rich, rural and urban, ethnic and religious minorities and majorities, young and old. The claim that the government is representative of a majority of the citizens is increasingly tenuous. To date, most OECD countries have devoted their energies to closing these gaps through redistribution or social policies which aim to ensure equitable access to public services for all citizens. A complementary path, one aiming to lower the threshold for access to policy making processes for people facing barriers to participation and hearing the voices of all citizens in policy making processes, has been less well travelled.
- **Leveraging knowledge and resources.** On the opposite end of the scale, many of the citizens who are not facing specific barriers to participation (in terms of their economic and educational levels) are also withdrawing from contact with government and are instead turning to private providers of services and policy advocacy (e.g. social enterprises and single issue civil society organisations). As they do so, the skills, ideas and political clout of society’s “well-endowed” citizens are being lost to public sector efforts at addressing today’s challenges in society. As long as their resources are being “invested” in achieving societal goals through other channels, then this need not be seen as a zero-sum game. Yet governments still need to understand the preferences of their citizens, if they are to successfully solicit their contribution.

- **Innovative solutions.** Public engagement is increasingly recognised as a **driver of innovation and value creation** in both the private and public sectors. There is a growing awareness that government cannot deal with complex problems alone and that citizens will have to play a larger part in achieving shared public policy goals (e.g. public health, climate change) (Lenihan *et al.*, 2007). Citizens are also taking the initiative to tackle issues in the public domain themselves. **Active citizenship** initiatives may remain completely autonomous. But they may also solicit governments to join, facilitate or create the necessary legal or regulatory frameworks for such projects to succeed.

Given the complexity and scale of emerging governance challenges, governments cannot hope to design effective policy responses, nor to strengthen legitimacy and trust, without the input, ideas and insights of as wide a variety of citizens' voices as possible. Public engagement will increasingly be recognised as another lever of governance – and become part of the standard government toolkit of budgeting, regulatory, e-government and performance management tools. However, this can only happen on the dual condition that the public engagement lever benefits both from greater resources and more rigorous evaluation than has been the case to date, in order to raise standards and improve practice. This report reviews current efforts by OECD countries along the road to achieving a greater degree of openness and inclusion in policy making and service delivery.

What do we mean by open and inclusive policy making?

Open refers to *transparency, accessibility and responsiveness* in the policy making process. As defined in earlier OECD work (OECD, 2005b), an “open” government is one that is:

- transparent, in other words being exposed to public scrutiny;
- accessible to anyone, anytime, anywhere; and
- responsive to new ideas and demands.

Inclusive denotes the effort to include as wide a variety of citizens' voices into the policy-making process as possible. The act of “inclusion” means in practice:

- Lowering the barriers of entry to participation for people who are **willing but unable** to participate. The barriers these people are facing can be socio-economic, cultural, geographical or barriers of another external nature.
- Increasing the appeal of participation for people who are **able but unwilling** to participate. These people face subjective rather than objective barriers. The lack of “appeal” of participation for them may stem from a low interest in politics, a lack of trust in how their input will be used, or limited personal benefits from participation.

Policy making includes all stages of the policy cycle: agenda setting, policy preparation, decision making, implementation and evaluation (OECD, 2001a).

Open and inclusive policy making is
transparent, accessible and responsive to as wide a range of citizens as possible.

What is the scope of this report?

This report provides a comparative overview of government efforts to promote open and inclusive policy making in 25 countries. The report has benefited from in-depth

discussions in an OECD Steering Group on Open and Inclusive Policy Making and was approved by the OECD Public Governance Committee (PGC) in October 2008. The PGC gathers government representatives from all 30 OECD member countries. The report:

- Provides comparative data based on questionnaire results – while recognising the importance of country context.
- Offers a series of concrete case studies – covering both policy making and service delivery.
- Includes a range of opinion pieces – to reflect the diverse perspectives of government officials, civil society practitioners and academics on current trends and future scenarios.
- Reflects the results of a broader discussion with civil society practitioners and government officials during an International Workshop held on 26-27 June 2008 in Ljubljana, Slovenia (see Box 1.1).

Who provided the data?

The aggregate results reported here are for 25 countries – referred to throughout the report as the “respondents” – that is, 23 OECD member countries² plus 2 observer countries (Chile and Slovenia) who are currently preparing for accession to the OECD. Given its special status and reach, the results of the European Commission’s questionnaire response are given separate mention throughout the report and have not been included in the aggregate data.

Who contributed to this report?

- **Steering Group on Open and Inclusive Policy Making** – Government representatives from 10 OECD countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, Korea, The Netherlands, Norway, Slovak Republic, Switzerland, Turkey, UK) and Slovenia served in the Steering Group. They were responsible for providing oversight, guidance and direction and met regularly in the course of this project (February 2007 in Helsinki, Paris in October 2007 and March 2008). These meetings also drew additional observers, such as representatives from France, New Zealand and the European Commission (see Annex C for full list of Steering Group members).
- **Public Governance Committee** – Government representatives from 30 OECD member countries and the European Commission represented on the OECD Public Governance Committee. Public Governance Committee members provided input and suggestions in the early stage of project (e.g. PGC Symposium of October 2007), general oversight and approval of this report.
- **Government experts** – by providing data, responding to questionnaires, drafting case studies.
- **Independent experts** – by providing case studies, independent reviews and quality control.
- **Civil society practitioners** – by responding to questionnaires, providing feedback and suggestions (see Annex D for full list).

What are the limits and legitimacy of this report?

This comparative review of progress in building open and inclusive policy making rests on self-reporting by governments – an approach that has both strengths and weaknesses. Clearly there is great value in collecting and presenting reliable information delivered

directly from central government units responsible for promoting openness and inclusion in policy making and service delivery. At the same time, this undoubtedly represents just one view of what is working and what is not. Governments, like all of us, are hardly immune to the biases of self-reporting. Finally, many of the questions in the survey were qualitative in nature and required respondents to exercise their judgement based on their knowledge and perceptions. As a result, the comparative data presented in the report should be taken as a good indication of current trends rather than as representing absolute values.

In order to ensure the legitimacy and credibility of this report, significant efforts have been made from the outset of the project to include data and opinions from a wider range of sources. A variety of channels have been used to this end:

- Collection of 54 questionnaire responses from civil society organisations (CSOs) in 14 countries whose results are highlighted throughout the report (see Annex D for full list).
- Participation of CSO representatives in meetings of the OECD Steering Group on Open and Inclusive Policy Making.
- Inclusion of opinion pieces from leading civil society practitioners in a range of OECD member countries (see Part III).
- Input from civil society practitioners gathered during the International Workshop on “Building Citizen Centred Policies and Services” of 26-27 June 2008 in Ljubljana, Slovenia which discussed the core themes of this report (see Box 1.1).

Box 1.1. Building citizen centred policies and services

The challenge of strengthening openness and ensuring inclusion in decision making on public policy and services is one shared by all countries. Over 80 participants from national and local government, civil society and international organisations from 21 OECD countries and 12 OECD non-member countries gathered in Ljubljana, Slovenia on 26-27 June 2008 to engage in policy dialogue and exchange good practice, tools and tips for building citizen centred policy and services based on their concrete experience. This international workshop was co-organised by the OECD and the Government of the Republic of Slovenia with the support of the World Bank’s Communication for Governance and Accountability Program (CommGAP), DECIM, the European Citizen Advisory Service (ECAS) and Involve (UK).

This event provided valuable input to this report and benefited from the presence of numerous authors of the opinion pieces in Part III. (For more information on the event see: www.oecd.org/gov/publicengagement or watch the custom-made video “Our voices: Building Citizen Centred Policies and Services” on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=FI3LSgODqWs.)

Rather than seeking an impossible global consensus, this report seeks to provide reliable comparative data, a selection of current practice and a rich diversity of approaches and opinions from a wide range of actors engaged in supporting openness and inclusion in policy making and service delivery. In addition, it offers 10 guiding principles as a guide to improving practice.

What do OECD governments see as the benefits of open and inclusive policy making?

In a democracy, public participation has **intrinsic value** by increasing accountability, broadening the sphere in which citizens can make or influence decisions and building civic capacity (Odugbemi S. and T. Jacobson, 2008). It offers **instrumental value** by strengthening the evidence base for policy making, reducing implementation costs and tapping greater reservoirs of experience and creativity for innovation in the design and delivery of public policy and services (Bourgon, 2007; Bourgon, Part III, this volume). Without a wider commitment to the intrinsic value of public engagement, it is hard for governments to reap the instrumental benefits they seek.

Respondents recognised both intrinsic and instrumental benefits of open and inclusive policy making. Over half of the respondents believed that it was “important” or “very important” in helping to improve government transparency and accountability (61%), responsiveness (48%), and effectiveness (43%). Less than a quarter saw it as a means of improving government accessibility (22%), legitimacy (17%), efficiency (13%) or of preventing corruption (9%). With respect to the benefits of open and inclusive policy making with regard to citizens, close to half of the respondents saw it as “important” or “very important” in increasing citizens’ trust (43%) and in raising their awareness and knowledge (43%). Over a third (39%) of the respondents believed that was “important” or “very important” in strengthening citizens’ scrutiny while less than a quarter saw it as a means of improving citizens’ compliance (22%) and strengthening social cohesion (22%).

What are OECD governments’ goals for open and inclusive policy making?

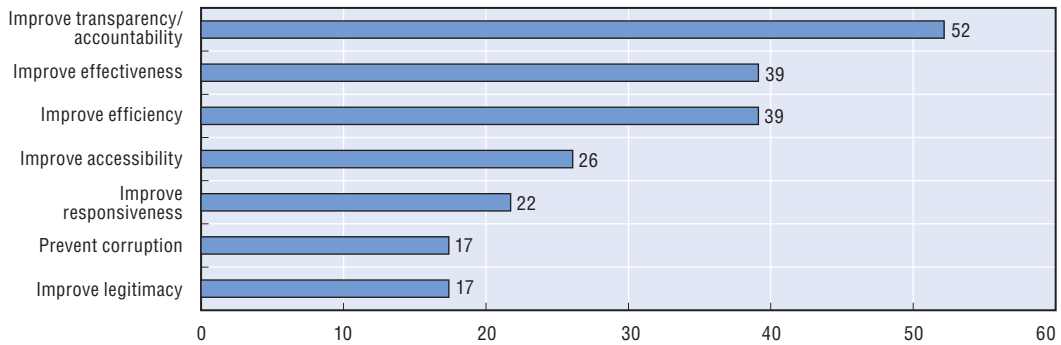
OECD governments are pursuing a range of different goals when they invest in open and inclusive policy making. Not only are the goals diverse, they are subject to change. Around 70% of the respondents indicate they have made changes or additions to their goals in the past 5 years.

Countries were asked to indicate which goals were of highest priority to them when pursuing open and inclusive policy making. These priorities were expressed both with respect to government and with respect to citizens.

Over half the respondents indicated that they sought to improve government transparency and accountability (52%) followed by improved effectiveness and efficiency (39% each). The European Commission also reported that its top priority goal was to improve transparency and accountability. Only 17% of the respondents reported that improving the legitimacy of government was a “very important” or “important” goal (Figure 1.2). These results suggest that most OECD governments pursue open and inclusive policy making for its instrumental, rather than intrinsic benefits. This is an important finding as it runs counter to the widely-held belief that investing in openness and inclusion may be virtuous, and good for democracy, but is not vital to the business of government.

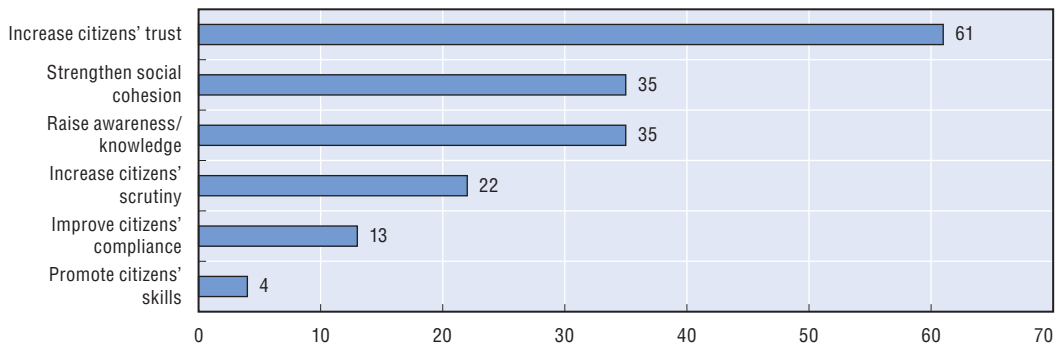
OECD countries are also pursuing open and inclusive policy making with an eye to their citizens. Within this set of options, the majority ranked increasing citizens’ trust as a “very important” or “important” goal (61%) (one which is also the top priority for the European Commission), while over a third saw it as a means of raising citizens’ awareness and knowledge (35%). Only a few respondents (4%) felt that it was “very important” or “important” in promoting citizens’ skills (Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.2. **What are OECD countries’ goals with respect to government?**
 (% respondents, n = 25 countries)



(% respondents ranking the option as “important” or “very important”.)

Figure 1.3. **What are OECD countries’ goals with respect to citizens?**
 (% respondents, n = 25 countries)



(% respondents ranking the option as “important” or “very important”.)

Finally, it should be noted that the aggregate “scores” for each of these goals can mask important differences between countries. For example, with regard to “strengthening social cohesion” a clear polarisation between countries could be observed. While 35% of the respondents saw open and inclusive policy making as a “very important” or “important” means of strengthening social cohesion (e.g. Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, The Netherlands), an equal number (35%) ranked it of no importance at all in this regard (e.g. Australia, Finland, Slovak Republic, Sweden).

Box 1.2. Australia: Citizen summits help shape long-term strategy

The Australian Government hosted the Australia 2020 Summit over the weekend of 18-19 April 2008. The Summit enabled the Australian Government to engage with 1 000 Australians to harness ideas and help shape a long-term strategy for the nation's future and to tackle the long-term challenges confronting Australia by thinking in new ways. The Summit was supplemented by over 500 local summits throughout Australia, a national Youth Summit, and almost 8 800 public submissions. The need to have a greater focus on the citizen in the delivery of government services was considered a priority at the 2020 Summit. The Prime Minister announced the public release of the Final Report on 31 May 2008 and promised a government response to the recommendations by the end of 2008.

(For more information see: www.australia2020.gov.au.)

OECD governments are at a crossroads

Several OECD countries have many decades of experience with open and inclusive policy making – to the extent that it has become second nature (*e.g.* Finland, The Netherlands). Other OECD countries, whose successful transition to the market economy and democratic government is more recent, have displayed a marked propensity to innovate and experiment with more open and inclusive approaches to policy making and service delivery in their efforts to improve economic and social outcomes for their citizens (*e.g.* Czech Republic, Korea).

Whatever their starting point, governments in all OECD countries are at a crossroads. To successfully meet the challenges they face will require a significant shift from a “government-as-usual” to a governance perspective. Governments now need to:

- **Mainstream public engagement to improve policy performance.** Real investments are needed to embed open and inclusive policy making as part of government’s “core business”, build skills among civil servants and establish a supportive political and administrative culture.
- **Develop effective evaluation tools.** Evaluating the quality of open and inclusive policy making processes and their impacts is a new frontier for most governments. Countries need to pool their efforts to develop appropriate evaluation frameworks, tools and training.
- **Leverage technology and the participative web.** Blogs, wikis and social media (also known as Web 2.0) do not automatically deliver public engagement. The conceptual models underpinning the participative web (*i.e.* horizontal *vs.* vertical; iterative *vs.* sequential; open *vs.* proprietary; multiple *vs.* binary) may be more powerful, and of wider application, than the tools themselves.
- **Adopt sound principles to support practice.** “One size fits all” is not an option. To be effective, open and inclusive policy making must be appropriately designed and context-specific for a given country, level of government and policy field. Yet a robust set of principles can guide practitioners when designing, implementing and evaluating their initiatives.

Notes

1. See Part III, this volume.
2. AUS, AUT, CAN, CZE, FIN, FRA, DEU, HUN, IRL, ITA, JPN, KOR, LUX, NLD, NOR, POL, SVK, ESP, SWE, CHE, TUR, GBR, USA.

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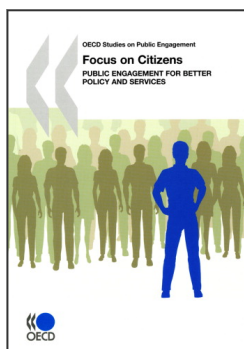
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